



Finglass, P. J. (2018). Sophocles' Oedipus and Herodotus' Periander. In E. Bowie (Ed.), *Herodotus. Narrator, Scientist, Historian* (pp. 59–75). (Trends in Classics Supplements; Vol. 59). Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110583557-004>

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In a classic article, ‘From Oedipus to Periander: lameness, tyranny, incest in legend and history’, published more than three decades ago in *Arethusa*,¹ Jean-Pierre Vernant focuses on what he calls the ‘strange parallelism in the destiny of the Labdacids of legendary Thebes and of the Cypselids of historical Corinth’.² The basic similarities in the infancy stories of Oedipus and Cypselus are well-known. Both are nearly killed shortly after their birth on the orders of people who, according to a prophecy, are doomed if the baby grows to manhood; yet in each case the killers shrink from the murder out of pity for the child, thereby allowing the prophecy to be fulfilled.³ Oedipus and Cypselus’ son Periander are both involved in struggles within the family, in Periander’s case with his son, in Oedipus’ with his father; Vernant daringly assimilates the punishments that they both inflict as a result of these conflicts.⁴ Both Periander and Oedipus engage in deviant sexual behaviour.⁵ And both families are associated with lameness: Cypselos is the son of Labda, Oedipus the grandson of Labdacus, and both these names derive from the archaic letter lambda which had one

I am most grateful to Professor Ewen Bowie for the invitation to contribute to this volume, and to Dr Almut Fries for helping me with a point in the translation of a German passage, below.

¹ Vernant (1982) = Buxton (2000) 109-29; on this topic see also Gentili (1986).

² Vernant (1982) 33 = Buxton (2000) 128.

³ *Ibid.* 28-9 = 121-3. For the significance of pity in both stories – an issue not discussed by Vernant – see Finglass (forthcoming), introduction.

⁴ Vernant (1982) 32 = Buxton (2000) 126: ‘Periander banishes his son, like a φαρμακός, to Corcyra, far from his eyes (ἐξ ὀφθαλμῶν μιν ἀποπέμπεται). The tyrant does not stab out his eyes in order to see no more, like Oedipus; he rejects his son so as to see him no more.’

⁵ In Periander’s case, his stripping of the women of Corinth (Hdt. 5.92.η,3), on which see Johnson (2001) 18-19.

‘leg’ shorter than the other.⁶ Labda in Herodotus is specifically said to be lame, and Oedipus’ ‘swollen feet’ as a result of their piercing when he was a baby must be an old feature of his story, built as it is into his very name.⁷ Vernant uses these connexions to argue that ‘in the Greek “imagination” the figure of the tyrant, as it is sketched out in the fifth and fourth centuries, adopts the features of the legendary hero, at once elect and cursed . . . Despising the rules which preside over the ordering of the social fabric . . . the tyrant . . . incarnates in his ambivalence the mythic figure of the lame man’.⁸

Vernant shows little interest, however, in the instantiations of the myth in the literary works which, together with the pictorial record, provide our sources for ancient Greek mythology. He sometimes takes details crucial to his argument from texts centuries apart, without considering whether such an approach might be problematic;⁹ and although sometimes a later source preserves evidence for an earlier version, the possibility must always be considered that the detail in question results

⁶ Robert (1915) 1 59, Delcourt (1938) 110-11, (1944) 16-22, Jameson (1986) 4 = (2014) 187-8 (who notes that the upturned Boeotian lambda would not have the same symbolism, and thus that the name Labdakos cannot have a Theban origin; he suggests it may be Corinthian).

⁷ Vernant’s view that Laius derives from λαῖφος ‘left’, and thus ‘crooked’ ((1982) 22-3 = Buxton (2000) 114), is however doubtful; the derivation from λάφος ‘people’ (cf. Latin *Publius*) is more likely (thus Jameson (1986) 10 n. 34 = (2014) 196 n. 28).

⁸ Vernant (1982) 33-4 = Buxton (2000) 128-9.

⁹ See the criticisms of Lloyd-Jones (1985) 167-71 = (1991) 184-7, who points to e.g. the detail, discussed by Vernant (1982) 24 = Buxton (2000) 115-16, that the Sphinx is Laius’ illegitimate daughter, the earliest evidence for which Vernant cites is in Pausanias (9.26.3-5).

merely from later elaboration.¹⁰ There are exceptions to this tendency – Vernant emphasises, for example, that Periander’s sleeping with his mother is preserved in a later source and so cannot be considered part of Herodotus’ tale.¹¹ But when dealing with the Oedipus myth in particular he culls details from many places without showing interest in any particular version, not even the most famous one, by Herodotus’ contemporary Sophocles, who is mentioned only once in the entire paper, and that in passing.¹²

In this chapter I will be focusing not on some original or primary version of either myth, but on a more modest goal: on the presentation of the myth in Sophocles and Herodotus, and in particular on something that Vernant does not mention, the issuing of a solemn proclamation of excommunication by Oedipus and by Periander. This element of both stories shows remarkable similarities; equally there are crucial differences, and reflecting on these can help to bring out the authors’ distinct literary aims.¹³

¹⁰ Cf. Bremmer (1987a) 42 ‘Historical and linguistic knowledge remains indispensable, even in a structuralist approach . . . In Greek mythology, . . . a chronological determination of the various motifs must . . . always be attempted.’

¹¹ Vernant (1982) 29-30 = Buxton (2000) 123-4. The detail appears first in Diog. Laert. 1.96; see further Parth. *Erot. Path.* 17 with Lightfoot (1999) 484-6.

¹² Vernant (1982) 20 = Buxton (2000) 110-11.

¹³ Cf. Saïd (2002) 127 ‘the dissimilarities [*sc.* between Oedipus and Cypselus] are as obvious as the similarities’. The earliest association of the proclamations known to me is that of Wesseling (1758) 221 on Hdt. 3.51: ‘ceterum a Periandri edicto Oedipi verba ap. *Sophoclem* Oed. Tyr. v. 347 μητ’ εἰσδέχεσθαι, μήτε προσφωνεῖν τινα non abirent multum, ni uberiores ea quae sequuntur, sanctionem conimplecterentur.’ More recent works that refer to it include Aly (1921) 95 = (1969) 95, Stern (1991) 309-10, and Sourvinou-Inwood (1988) 176 n. 82 = (1991) 276-7 n. 82 (‘this similarity has not hitherto been placed, as I think it should, in the wider context of “father-son conflict”, the basic schema to

Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* begins with a supplication of Oedipus by the people of his city, who are afflicted by a plague of mysterious origin. He learns from the Delphi oracle that to cure this disease, he must punish, by execution or banishment, the killers of the former king Laius. Prompted by that oracle, at the start of the second scene of the play he issues a formal proclamation setting out what the killer should do, and what the community should do if he does not. Below I quote the proclamation in full, one of the difficult speeches in tragic corpus; I provide my own text and translation, the justifications for which can be found in my forthcoming commentary on the play.¹⁴

Οι.	αἰτεῖς· ἃ δ' αἰτεῖς, τᾶμ' ἐὰν θέλῃς ἔπη	216
	κλύων δέχεσθαι τῇ νόσῳ θ' ὑπηρετεῖν, ἀλκὴν λάβοις ἂν κἀνακούφισιν κακῶν· ἀγῶ ξένος μὲν τοῦ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐξερῶ, ξένος δὲ τοῦ πραχθέντος· οὐ γὰρ ἂν μακρὰν	220
	ἵχνεον αὐτός, μὴ οὐκ ἔχων τι σύμβολον. νῦν δ', ὕστερος γὰρ ἀστὸς εἰς ἀστοὺς τελῶ, ὕμιν προφωνῶ πᾶσι Καδμείοις τάδε· ὅστις ποθ' ὕμῶν Λαῖον τὸν Λαβδάκου κάτοιδεν ἀνδρὸς ἐκ τίνος διώλετο,	225
	τοῦτον κελεύω πάντα σημαίνειν ἐμοί· κεῖ μὲν φοβεῖται τοῦ πίκλημ' ὑπεξελῶν <x—υ—x—υ—x—υ—>	
	αὐτὸς κατ' αὐτοῦ· πείσεται γὰρ ἄλλο μὲν	

which both Oedipous' and Lykophron's stories belong'); Boedeker (2002) 112-14 examines the relationship between myth and history in Herodotus' account. According to Gray (1996) 376, 'the substitution of banishment for killing in the story of Lycophron represents that story's own adaptation to the theme of revenge and the desolate household, because the heir must eventually be killed by the Corcyreans'; but this underplays how meaningful the theme of banishment turns out to be within Herodotus' story.

¹⁴ Finglass (forthcoming) *ad loc.*; also (2006) 260-1.

ἀστεργές οὐδέν, γῆς δ' ἄπεισιν ἀβλαβής.
 εἰ δ' αὖ τις ἄλλον οἶδεν ἐξ ἄλλης χθονός 230
 τὸν αὐτόχειρα, μὴ σιωπάτω· τὸ γὰρ
 κέρδος τελῶ ἔγω χῆ χάρις προσκείσεται.
 εἰ δ' αὖ σιωπήσεσθε, καί τις ἢ φίλου
 δείσας ἀπώσσει τοῦτος ἢ χαῦτοῦ τόδε,
 ἄκ τῶνδε δράσω, ταῦτα χρή κλυεῖν ἐμοῦ. 235
 τὸν ἄνδρ' ἀπαυδῶ τοῦτον, ὅστις ἐστί, γῆς
 τῆσδ', ἧς ἐγὼ κράτη τε καὶ θρόνους νέμω,
 μήτ' ἐσδέχεσθαι μήτε προσφωνεῖν τινά,
 μήτ' ἐν θεῶν εὐχαῖσι μήτε θύμασιν
 κοινὸν ποεῖσθαι, μήτε χέρνιβος νέμειν· 240
 ὠθεῖν δ' ἀπ' οἴκων πάντας, ὡς μιάσματος
 τοῦδ' ἡμῖν ὄντος, ὡς τὸ Πυθικὸν θεοῦ
 μαντεῖον ἐξέφηνεν ἀρτίως ἐμοί.
 ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν τοιόσδε τῶ τε δαίμονι
 τῶ τ' ἄνδρὶ τῶ θανόντι σύμμαχος πέλω. 245
 [κατεύχομαι δὲ τὸν δεδρακότ', εἴτε τις
 εἷς ὢν λέληθεν εἴτε πλειόνων μέτα,
 κακὸν κακῶς νιν ἄμοιρον ἐκτρίψαι βίον.
 ἐπεύχομαι δ', οἴκοισιν εἰ ξυνέστιος
 ἐν τοῖς ἐμοῖς γένοιτ' ἐμοῦ ξυνειδότος, 250
 παθεῖν ἅπερ τοῖσδ' ἀρτίως ἡρασάμην.]
 ὑμῖν δὲ ταῦτα πάντ' ἐπισκήπτω τελεῖν,
 ὑπέρ τ' ἐμαντοῦ, τοῦ θεοῦ τε, τῆσδέ τε
 γῆς ὧδ' ἀκάρπως κάθως ἐφθαρμένης.
 οὐδ' εἰ γὰρ ἦν τὸ πρᾶγμα μὴ θεήλατον, 255
 ἀκάθαρτον ὑμᾶς εἰκὸς ἦν οὕτως ἔαν
 ἀνδρός γ' ἀριστεύως βασιλέως τ' ὀλωλότος,
 ἀλλ' ἐξερευνᾶν· νῦν δ' ἐπεὶ κυρῶ τ' ἐγὼ
 ἔχων μὲν ἀρχάς, ἃς ἐκεῖνος εἶχε πρίν,
 ἔχων δὲ λέκτρα καὶ γυναιχ' ὁμόσπορον, 260
 κοινῶν τε παίδων κοῖν' ἄν, εἰ κείνῳ γένος
 μὴ ὕδυστύχησεν, ἦν ἂν ἐκπεφυκότα –
 νῦν δ' ἐς τὸ κείνου κρᾶτ' ἐνήλαθ' ἡ τύχη·
 ἀνθ' ὧν ἐγὼ τάδ' ὥσπερ τοῦμοῦ πατρός
 ὑπερμαχοῦμαι καπὶ πάντ' ἀφίξομαι 265
 ζητῶν τὸν αὐτόχειρα τοῦ φόνου λαβεῖν

τῷ Λαβδακείῳ παιδὶ Πολυδώρου τε καὶ
τοῦ πρόσθε Κάδμου τοῦ πάλαι τ' Ἀγήνορος.
καὶ ταῦτα τοῖς μὴ δρῶσιν εὔχομαι θεοὺς
μήτ' ἄροτον αὐτοῖς γῆς ἀνιέναι τινὰ

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μήτ' οὖν γυναικῶν παῖδας, ἀλλὰ τῷ πότμῳ
τῷ νῦν φθερεῖσθαι κᾶτι τοῦδ' ἐχθίονι.
ὕμιν δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοισι Καδμείοις, ὅσοις
τάδ' ἔστ' ἀρέσκονθ', ἥ τε σύμμαχος Δίκη
χοὶ πάντες εὖ ξυνεῖεν εἰσαεὶ θεοί.

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You make a request. As for the nature of that request, if you are willing to receive my words as you hear them and to minister to the disease, you may acquire a defence against, and a relief from, your troubles. I will speak them as a stranger to this story, a stranger to the deed – for I would not be investigating far into the past on my own if I did not have some connexion. As it is, since at a later date I am enrolled as a citizen among citizens, this is what I proclaim to you, to all the Cadmaeans. Whosoever of you knows the man by whom Laius the son of Labdacus was killed, I order him to tell me the whole story. And if he is afraid that, removing the charge . . . himself against himself; for he will suffer nothing else unpleasant, but will depart from the land unharmed. But if anyone knows that the killer is a different person from a different land, let him not be silent; for I will pay the reward, and gratitude will be added to that. But if you are silent, and if anyone rejects these my words out of fear for a friend or for himself, you must hear me say what I will do as a consequence. As for this man, whoever he is, I forbid anyone from this land, whose authority and throne I hold, to receive him into his home or to address him, or to make him a fellow-participant in prayers to the gods or in sacrifices, or to give him his allotment of sacred water. Rather, I command everyone to drive him from their homes, since this man is the cause of our pollution, as the god's Pythian oracle has just revealed to me. Such an ally am I for the god and for the dead man. [I pray that the perpetrator, whether he is a single person in hiding, or whether he did it as part of a larger group, will, as a wretch, wretchedly rub out his life, without his due portion. And I pray that if he were to share my hearth in my home with my knowledge, that I should suffer what I have

just prayed for these people.] I solemnly charge you to accomplish all these things, on my behalf, on behalf of the god, and on behalf of this land, which has wasted away, abandoned by crops and abandoned by the gods. For even if the affair had not been forced on us by divinity, it was not reasonable that you should have let the matter lie carelessly, unpurified when a man who was a noble and a king had been killed – no, you should have sought it out. As it is, since it has turned out that I possess the power that he held before, and possess his bed and the wife who shares our seed, and since a share in shared children, if offspring had not failed for him, would have been generated – but as it is, fate leaped onto that man’s head. Because of this, I will pursue this fight as if it were on behalf of my own father, and will go to every length as I seek to capture the perpetrator of the killing, on behalf of the son of Labdacus, the son of Polydorus, descendent of old Cadmus and of ancient Agenor. And for those who do not do these things, I pray that the gods do not produce any crops from their land, nor indeed children from their women, but rather that they will be destroyed by their present fate and by one even more hateful than this. But for you, the rest of the Cadmeians, for whom this things are pleasing, may Justice our ally and all the gods be with you always.

A ruler’s proclamation cutting off an offender from human contact reappears in Herodotus’ account of Periander and his son Lycophron.¹⁵ Periander had beaten to death his wife Melissa, by whom he had had two sons, an elder, unnamed son, slow of intellect, and the younger, Lycophron. When their maternal grandfather, Procles of Epidaurus, was sending them back to their father after a visit to him, he asked if they knew who killed their mother. The elder son took no notice of the question, but the younger evidently concluded from it that Periander was responsible. So after his return to Corinth, Lycophron persistently refused to speak to his father, enraged. As a result Periander eventually drove him out of his house. On learning the cause of

¹⁵ Hdt. 3.50-3.

Lycophron's silence from his brother, Periander went further, sending a messenger to any people giving shelter to Lycophron to order them to desist. Lycophron consequently passed from one house to the next, until finally Periander issued a solemn proclamation excommunicating him from human society:

ὁ Περίανδρος κήρυγμα ἐποιήσατο, ὃς ἂν ἡ οἰκίῳσι ὑποδέξηται μιν ἢ προσδιαλεχθῇ, ἱρὴν ζημίην τοῦτον τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι ὀφείλῃν, ὅσῃν δὴ εἴπας. πρὸς ὧν δὴ τοῦτο τὸ κήρυγμα οὔτε τίς οἱ διαλέγεσθαι οὔτε οἰκίῳσι δέκεσθαι ἤθελε· πρὸς δὲ οὐδὲ αὐτὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐδικαίου πειρᾶσθαι ἀπειρημένου, ἀλλὰ διακαρτερέων ἐν τῇσι στοιῇσι ἐκαλινδέετο.

Periander made a proclamation that whoever received him into his home or conversed with him would owe a penalty sacred to Apollo, stating the amount. So thanks to this proclamation nobody was willing to converse with him or to receive him into his house. Moreover, not even Lycophron himself thought it right to make the attempt, since he had been excommunicated, but he put up with rolling in the porticoes.

Hdt. 3.52.1-2

Periander now confronted his son, all but admitting his own guilt, and begging him to return; but Lycophron replied simply that he now owed a fine to Apollo. Realising that the cause was hopeless, the tyrant arranged for Lycophron to be taken to Corcyra, out of his sight. Years later, Periander attempted to persuade his son to return to Corinth to take over the tyranny from him; but first a messenger, and then the boy's own sister failed to persuade him to return to his father's presence. Eventually Periander proposed that Lycophron should come to Corinth and he, Periander, should depart for Corcyra; Lycophron agreed to this, but before the plan could be put into effect, the Corcyrans, not wanting to have Periander to deal with at close hand, murdered his son to prevent the swap.

Given the similarities between Oedipus and the Cypselid family identified by Vernant, the prominence of proclamations in both their stories is intriguing. Before we discuss them in more detail, however, it is well to emphasise that issuing decrees of excommunication was not merely the prerogative of long-dead kings, but something familiar in an Athenian civic context; I say ‘Athenian’ because that is the civic context about which we happen to be best informed, although nothing ties the process to any one Greek state in particular, and if we knew more about the internal politics of Sicyon or Corinth no doubt we would find references to it there too. The Athenian evidence, at least, goes back to at least the time of Draco:

ἐν τοίνυν τοῖς περὶ τούτων νόμοις ὁ Δράκων φοβερὸν κατασκευάζων καὶ δεινὸν τό τιν’ αὐτόχειρα ἄλλον ἄλλου γίγνεσθαι, καὶ γράφων χέρνιβος εἵργεσθαι τὸν ἀνδροφόνον, σπονδῶν, κρατήρων, ἱερῶν, ἀγορᾶς, πάντα τ’ ἄλλα διελθῶν οἷς μάλιστα’ ἂν τινὰς ᾤετ’ ἐπισχεῖν τοῦ τοιοῦτόν τι ποιεῖν, ὅμως οὐκ ἀφείλετο τὴν τοῦ δικαίου τάξιν, ἀλλ’ ἔθηκεν ἐφ’ οἷς ἐξεῖναι ἀποκτινύναι, καὶ οὕτω τις δράσῃ, καθαρὸν διώρισεν εἶναι.

Therefore in his laws concerning these things [*sc.* murders], Dracon, making it a fearful and terrible thing for one person to become the murderer of another, and writing that the murderer should be deprived of holy water, of libations, of mixing-bowls, of sacrifices, of the agora, and going through all the other things through which he thought that he would restrain people from doing anything of this sort, nevertheless did not take away due process, but established the conditions by which it was permitted to commit homicide, and if someone behaved in this way, he ordained that he would be pure.

Dem. 20.158¹⁶

¹⁶ On this passage see Kremmydas (2012) *ad loc.*

Such regulations were also in force in the fifth and fourth centuries, as the following selection of passages demonstrates:

ἔτι δὲ παρελθὼν τὸν νόμον ὃν ὑμεῖς ἔθεσθε, εἵργεσθαι τῶν ἱερῶν αὐτὸν ὡς ἀλιτήριον ὄντα, ταῦτα πάντα βιασάμενος εἰσελήλυθεν ἡμῶν εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ ἔθυσεν ἐπὶ τῶν βωμῶν ὧν οὐκ ἔξῃν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀπήντα τοῖς ἱεροῖς περὶ ἃ ἠσέβησεν, εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ Ἐλευσίνιον, ἐχερνίσατο ἐκ τῆς ἱερᾶς χέρνιβος.

Still breaking the law which you established, that he should be deprived of sacrifices as being an offender, doing violence to all this he entered our city, and sacrificed on the altars which he was not permitted to do and he went to meet the sacrifices concerning which he had committed his impiety, came into the Eleusinion, washed himself with the holy water.

Lys. 6.52¹⁷

ἐὰν δέ τις τὸν ἀνδροφόνον κτείνει ἢ αἴτιος ᾗ φόνου, ἀπεχόμενον ἀγορᾶς ἐφορίας καὶ ἄθλων καὶ ἱερῶν Ἀμφικτυονικῶν, ὥσπερ τὸν Ἀθηναῖον κτείναντα, ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐνέχεσθαι, διαγιγνώσκειν δὲ τοὺς ἐφέτας.

If someone kills a murderer or is responsible for his death, he should be kept away from the agora . . . and competitions and the Amphictyonic games, just as someone who killed an Athenian, and subject to the same penalties; the *ephetai* should make the decision.

Dem. 23.37 = IG I³ 104.26-9¹⁸

λαγχάνονται . . . καὶ αἱ τοῦ φόνου δίκαι πᾶσαι πρὸς τοῦτον, καὶ ὁ προαγορεύων εἵργεσθαι τῶν νομίμων οὗτός ἐστιν

¹⁷ The asyndeton in the last line gives the description of the offence particular force.

¹⁸ On this text see Canevaro (2013) 55-8.

Cases involving murder fall to the lot of this man [i.e. the archon basileus], and he is the person who proclaims excommunication from customary rites.

[Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.2

κατελθὼν δὲ ὅ τι τοιοῦτον δράσας, τοῖς αὐτοῦ παισὶν ἱερῶν μὴ κοινωνεῖτω μηδὲ ὁμοτράπεζος γιγνέσθω ποτέ.

When he returns after committing an act of this kind [i.e. when a spouse-killer returns from the designated period of exile], let him not share in sacrifices with his own children nor let him ever share a table with them.

Pl. *Leg.* 868e

Excommunication could also be an informal sanction on the part of a community against offenders of various types – something that underlies this passage of Sophocles:

ἄπολις ὅτῳ τὸ μὴ καλὸν
ξύνεστι τόλμας χάριν.
μήτ' ἐμοὶ παρέστιος
γένοιτο μήτ' ἴσον φρονῶν
ὅς τάδ' ἔρδοι.

Citiless is the man who consorts with what is not noble thanks to his boldness. Let that man never share my hearth or share my thoughts, whoever should do such things!

Soph. *Ant.* 370/1-375

Such passages might be more closely connected with civic acts of excommunication than at first appears; as Parker argues, ‘there are historical instances of public malefactors being subjected to what appears at first sight to be a spontaneous social ostracism, but could be a survival of a more formal earlier institution’.¹⁹

Nor is *Oedipus the King* the only tragedy which makes use of a formal excommunication. We also find one in Euripides’ *Orestes*, where Orestes, Pylades, and Electra are deprived of human contact ahead of the trial that will determine their fate, as described in these passages, the former spoken by Orestes, the latter by Tyndareus:²⁰

ἔδοξε δ’ Ἀργεῖ τῷδε μήθ’ ἡμᾶς στέγαις,
μὴ πυρὶ δέχεσθαι, μηδὲ προσφωνεῖν τινα
μητροκτονοῦντας· κυρία δ’ ἦδ’ ἡμέρα
ἐν ἣ διοίσει ψῆφον Ἀργείων πόλις,
εἰ χρὴ θανεῖν νῶ λευσίμῳ πετρώματι.

It was decided by this land of Argos that no-one should receive us under his roof or at his hearth, and that no-one should speak to us, since we are matricides; this is the appointed day on which the city of the Argives will cast its vote on whether we must die by stoning.

Eur. *Or.* 46-50

καλῶς ἔθεντο ταῦτα πατέρες οἱ πάλοι·
ἐς ὀμμάτων μὲν ὄψιν οὐκ εἶων περᾶν
οὐδ’ εἰς ἀπάντημ’ ὅστις αἶμ’ ἔχων κυροῖ,
φυγαῖσι δ’ ὀσιοῦν, ἀνταποκτείνειν δὲ μή.

¹⁹ Thus Parker (1983) 194 citing, in n. 17, Hdt. 7.231, Lys. 13.79, and other texts.

²⁰ For these passages see Melis (2015), who sets them in the judicial context described above.

Our fathers established these things well. Whoever had the taint of blood, they did not allow him to come into people's sight or to encounter anyone, but they restored purity by exile, but did not allow them to be killed

Ibid. 512-15

The *Orestes* excommunication takes place in a democratic context – indeed, it is presented as the result of a vote by the Argives as a whole, and thus formally more democratic than the Athenian instances cited above, where such proclamations are usually pronounced by a magistrate acting on the people's behalf.

The passages just cited indicate that the very act of issuing such a proclamation is not in itself tyrannical or overbearing – rather, it was a feature familiar to Greeks of this period. The next question is how the proclamations by Oedipus and Periander put this feature to use. In their treatments it is not hard to observe prominent similarities. In both cases the proclamation is issued by an all-powerful ruler; in both cases it is aimed at cutting off an offender from all human intercourse. The offence that has given rise to the proclamation in both cases derives from an act of violence within the family, and in particular a son's defiance of his father. The proclamation in both cases rebounds onto the proclaimer, who breaks the very proclamation that he had so publicly pronounced; he thereby causing himself to be subject to its penalties, in each case a penalty owed to Apollo.²¹ And in both cases the proclaimer unwittingly causes the death of a close family member.

Let us leave, for the moment, the question of whether either Herodotus or Sophocles was aware of the other's work. For now, let us examine the two

²¹ 'This must be connected with Apollo's function as the god concerned with pollution *par excellence*' (Sourvinou-Inwood (1988) 176 n. 84 = (1991) 277 n. 84).

proclamations in greater detail, to tease out the differences between these formally similar acts and thus better to appreciate the functions that they play within their respective narratives.

First, although both proclamations have their origins in violence within the family, only one proclaimer knows this at the time that the proclamation is delivered. Periander is well aware of the offence that he has committed, having killed his wife, and knows that his proclamation is targeted against his own son. Oedipus, by contrast, regards himself as ‘a stranger to this story, a stranger to the deed’, entirely unaware both that he is making a proclamation against himself as the killer of Laius, and that Laius was his own father. This reflects a central theme of Sophocles’ play, one not so important in Herodotus’ account of Periander – the frailty of human knowledge. Herodotus, by contrast, focuses on the abuse of power represented by Periander’s proclamation – a subject central to the portrayal of tyrants throughout his history.

Second, the scope and limits of the two proclamations are different. Periander’s is apparently aimed at the whole of Greece; certainly, there is no indication that Lycophron can escape his father’s antagonism merely by going into exile. In this respect the proclamation demonstrates a tyrant’s typical overreach. Moreover, it follows a repeated set of interventions whereby Periander orders private citizens not to receive Lycophron into their homes, thereby interfering with their rights as householders;²² and these in turn came after the original harsh punishment meted out to his son, expulsion from the family home. Oedipus, by contrast, allows the killer to go into exile unharmed after incriminating himself, a course which makes a confession more likely and displays his own merciful character. He also carefully

²² Such behaviour recalls that of Eurystheus before the actions of Euripides’ *Children of Heracles*, who threatens with the might of Argos each of the cities with which they take refuge (17-25).

specifies that his proclamation applies to the territory within his jurisdiction, thereby acknowledging the limits of his authority. He moreover asserts his right to make the proclamation on the basis of his adopted Theban citizenship, as someone ‘enrolled as a citizen among citizens’, where the polyptoton emphasises his status as one among many, rather than as a ruler with unique authority. He does possess such authority, as the Prologue demonstrated, and in effect his proclamation shows him exercising it, since no ordinary citizen could make a speech like that and expect people to listen; but tactfully he does not press that point.

In this respect we may also contrast the parallel passages cited above, where excommunication features as a means of isolating people suspected of heinous crimes before they are brought to trial; if convicted, they will suffer the ultimate excommunication, death. In the case of Periander’s proclamation, the target has committed no offence, so the isolation of a criminal is not at issue. In Oedipus’ speech, excommunication applies to the killer only if he fails to come forward, and, although that penalty is depicted in serious terms, there is no capping reference to any prospect of execution. This difference is partly because there is no prospect of a trial, either; such formal judicial apparatus does not feature within the world of this play. But it is also because Oedipus is being as mild as he is determined in his pursuit of the offender; his passionate desire to discover Laius’ killer is based on his love for the city and his consequent wish to fulfil the instructions of the oracle, rather than on any personal lust for vengeance.

This point is worth highlighting since Vernant places considerable emphasis on how Oedipus and Periander are both associated with the connected ideas of lameness and tyranny. Yet the proclamations that the two men utter, through their different styles, rather emphasise different approaches to rulership. Oedipus’

behaviour stands as far away from that of the typical tyrant as it is possible to be; Periander's proclamation, on the other hand, is the culmination of a series of unmerited attacks on the liberty of his son and those who want to help him. As far as the portrayal of Oedipus in Sophocles' play goes, then, Vernant's article could scarcely be less applicable.

This leads naturally to the third difference, the justification for the excommunication. As we have seen from the proclamations from other texts cited above, excommunication was a punishment applied to people suspected of great crimes – usually, indeed ahead of a trial – because of the danger that if the person has indeed committed the crime of which he is suspected, he could pollute others by mere association, especially in religious contexts that demanded purity of their participants. Oedipus' proclamation suits that context well, even if an eventual trial is not envisaged; its target is not just a killer, but the killer of a king, who has spurned Oedipus' offer of an easy exile. In Periander's case, by contrast, there is no possibility that the target of the proclamation, Lycophoron, could pollute anyone else. Indeed, the polluter in this story is the proclaimer; and the proclamation is aimed not at a polluter, but at the only person in Corinth who seems to have discovered the polluter's guilt. In the words of Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Lykophron is treated as though he had killed Periander',²³ when if anything it should be Lycophron who delivers a proclamation against Periander for the killing of his mother. Sourvinou-Inwood nevertheless goes on to try to fit the events described by Herodotus into the expected schema whereby the object of the proclamation is indeed the offender, arguing that in Lycophron's case, "“turning against the father” is symbolically closely related to “killing the father”" (p. 177 = p. 260). This misses the irony that the usual roles of

²³ Sourvinou-Inwood (1988) 177 = (1991) 260.

guilt and innocence are knowingly reversed, with Periander showing the tyrant's capacity to pervert the institutions of justice as well as normal human relationships. The irony in Sophocles' play, by contrast, is of a different order – there too the proclaimer is the polluter, but the proclaimer is tragically unaware of that fact.

Fourth, the breaking of the proclamation by the man who delivers it takes a significantly different form in each account. Oedipus breaks it out of ignorance, as he later remarks;²⁴ again, this befits a tragedy built around the theme of the limitations of human knowledge. Periander breaks it out of desperation, but nevertheless knowingly. He thereby demonstrates the inconsistency of the tyrant – something anticipated by those people who, before the excommunication, gave shelter to Lycophron despite knowing of his quarrel with his father, because he was nevertheless his father's son.²⁵

Fifth, these excommunications by proclamation are not the only ones in either story. Both Sophocles' play and Herodotus' Periander-logos contain two voluntary acts of excommunication. In the former, Oedipus as it were excommunicates himself from what he believes to be his homeland, Corinth, when he is told by the Delphic oracle that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother:

λάθρα δὲ μητρὸς καὶ πατρὸς πορεύομαι
Πυθῶδε, καὶ μ' ὁ Φοῖβος ὦν μὲν ἰκόμην
ἄτιμον ἐξέπεμψεν, ἄλλα δ' ἀθλίῳ
καὶ δεινὰ καὶ δύστηνα προὔφάνη λέγων, 790

²⁴ Soph. *OR* 744-5 οἴμοι τάλας· ἔοικ' ἑμαυτὸν εἰς ἄρας | δεινὰς προβάλλων ἀρτίως οὐκ εἰδέναι
(*Oimoi*, I am wretched! I seem just now to have unwittingly cast myself amid dreadful curses').

²⁵ Compare how the servants of Cambyses, ordered by the king to kill a friend of his, do not carry out the order because they anticipate that he will change his mind; when eventually he does so he is delighted that his friend is alive, but nevertheless executes the servants who disobeyed him (Hdt. 3.36.4-6).

ὥς μητρὶ μὲν χρεῖη με μειχθῆναι, γένος δ'
 ἄτλητον ἀνθρώποισι δηλώσοιμ' ὅρᾱν,
 φονεὺς δ' ἐσοίμην τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός.
 κἀγὼ 'πακούσας ταῦτα τὴν Κορινθίαν
 ἄστροις τὸ λοιπὸν τεκμαρούμενος χθόνα

795

ἔφευγον, ἔνθα μήποτ' ὀψοίμην κακῶν
 χρησμῶν ὀνειδῆ τῶν ἐμῶν τελούμενα.

In secret from my mother and father I travelled to Pytho, and Phoebus sent me away without honouring the purpose for which I had come, but rather he was manifest in speaking other dire, terrible, words to me in my wretchedness, that it was fated that I should have intercourse with my mother, and display an unbearable progeny for mortals to see, and that I would be the murderer of the man who fathered me. And I, on hearing this, went into exile, intending henceforth to infer the position of the land of Corinth by the stars, to a place where I would never see the reproaches of the terrible oracles come true.

Soph. *OR* 787-97

In this case, Oedipus knowingly excommunicates himself, departing from his homeland for good; he later remarks on the pain that this involves.²⁶ This excommunication too is based on ignorance; ignorant of who his parents truly are, and therefore of his true homeland, he excommunicates himself from the land into which he was originally 'excommunicated' as a baby, thereby achieving the exact opposite of his intentions.

The additional excommunication in Herodotus' tale involves Lycophron by his silence as it were excommunicating Periander himself. The formal

²⁶ Soph. *OR* 997-9 ὦν οὐνεχ' ἡ Κόρινθος ἐξ ἐμοῦ πάλαι | μακρὰν ἀπωκεῖτ'. εὐτυχῶς μὲν, ἀλλ' ὅμως | τὰ τῶν τεκόντων ὄμμαθ' ἡδιστον βλέπειν. 'Because of this, Corinth for a long time has been kept far separate from me. It was for a good end, but nevertheless it is most pleasant to look upon the eyes of one's parents.'

excommunication in that story punishes a guiltless party; but that is merely a response to the informal excommunication, achieved without any formal proclamation on Lycophron's part, and yet which proves far more effective and durable than the excommunication effected by Periander. For whereas Periander goes on to break the excommunication that he has ordained by going to plead with his son, Lycophron remains implacable, merely pointing out to him the penalty that his speech has automatically incurred; he maintains his own, informal excommunication of his father to the last. The double excommunication in Sophocles emphasises the ignorance of the protagonist; in Herodotus, by contrast, it highlights the paradoxical weakness of the almighty tyrant.

All these differences allow a better appreciation of what Sophocles and Herodotus are trying to achieve in their respective tales; Vernant's influential paper had emphasised only what they had in common, but the divergences too have their significance. But one similarity remains that has not so far been remarked on: the essentially tragic nature of both stories. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* was of course seen as a paradigmatic tragedy even in antiquity. Calling the story of Periander a tragedy requires more justification, in that he brings his doom upon himself through his own tyrannical behaviour, in particular the killing of his wife and the persecution of his son. Yet even so he remains a wretched, even sympathetic figure, as his exchange with his son demonstrates:²⁷

τετάρτη δὲ ἡμέρῃ ἰδὼν μιν ὁ Περίανδρος ἀλυσίῃσιν τε καὶ ἀσιτίῃσιν
συμπεπτωκότα οἴκτιρε· ὑπεῖς δὲ τῆς ὀργῆς ἦτε ἄσσοι καὶ ἔλεγε “ὦ παῖ, κόττερα
τούτων αἰρετώτερά ἐστι, ταῦτα τὰ νῦν ἔχων πρήσσεις, ἢ τὴν τυραννίδα καὶ τὰ
ἀγαθὰ τὰ νῦν ἐγὼ ἔχω, ταῦτα ἔοντα τῷ πατρὶ ἐπιτήδεον παραλαμβάνειν; ὅς

²⁷ Hdt. 3.52.3-5.

ἔων ἐμός τε παῖς καὶ Κορίνθου τῆς εὐδαίμονος βασιλεὺς ἀλήτην βίον εἴλεν,
ἀντιστατέων τε καὶ ὀργῇ χρεώμενος ἐς τόν σε ἥκιστα ἐχρῆν. εἰ γάρ τις συμφορὴ
ἐν αὐτοῖσι γέγονε, ἐξ ἧς ὑποψίην ἐς ἐμὲ ἔχεις, ἐμοί τε αὕτη γέγονε καὶ ἐγὼ αὐτῆς
τὸ πλεῦν μέτοχος εἰμί, ὅσῳ αὐτός σφεα ἐξεργασάμην. σὺ δὲ μαθὼν ὅσῳ
φθονέεσθαι κρέσσον ἐστὶ ἢ οἰκτίρεσθαι, ἅμα τε ὁκοῖόν τι ἐς τοὺς τοκέας καὶ ἐς
τοὺς κρέσσονας τεθυμῶσθαι, ἅπιθι ἐς τὰ οἰκία.”

Seeing him on the fourth day fallen amid filth and hunger Periander had pity on him. Departing from his anger, he came closer to him and said ‘My son, which of these is preferable, doing what you are doing now, or to inherit the monarchy and good things that I now have by being accommodating to your father, you who although you are my son and a prince of wealthy Corinth have chosen the life of a beggar, keeping your distance and indulging in anger against the person whom you ought not to most of all. For if any misfortune in such matters has occurred from which you have suspicion against me, the same has happened to me and I am a sharer in it to a greater extent, to the degree that I myself actually carried out the deeds. But you learn how much better it is to be envied than to be pitied, and at the same time what a thing it is to be angry against your parents and those more powerful than you, and come back home.’

Periander’s words are to an extent tendentious; such emphasis on the family bond on father and son (especially ‘indulging in anger against the person whom you ought not to most of all’) hardly suits a man who had killed his own wife, the mother of that son. Moreover, his admission of responsibility is half-hearted; and the final words ‘what a thing it is to be angry against your parents and those more powerful than you’ contain a not-so-veiled threat by reminding Lycophron of his power. The reference to envy being preferable to pity, itself a commonplace,²⁸ is out of place in a speech that shows the unenviable consequences of a tyrant’s actions. Nevertheless, these are

²⁸ Cf. Pind. *P.* 1.85.

moving words that show that even a tyrant can be affected by pity (something confirmed by the narrator), and demonstrate the impact of Periander's actions on the man himself. And although the reader or listener may understand why, despite this speech, Lycophron still refuses to address his father, or rather answers him with a curt response worse than silence, that response may nevertheless create some pity in Herodotus' readers even for Periander. His subsequent decision to hand control of his empire to his son, willingness to exchange Corinth for Corcyra to secure the transition of power, and vengeance on the Corcyreans for compassing Lycophron's death all testify, in their way, to a father's paternal devotion. Herodotus has so constructed his tale that it is hard not to feel any sympathy for the catastrophes that envelop Periander, even though they are ultimately caused by his own wrongheadedness, and as a result the adjective tragic would not be misapplied.

The Oedipus story is not the only relevant tragic comparandum for Herodotus' account of Periander. It recalls also the relationship between Clytemnestra and Electra in Sophocles' *Electra*, a play probably from after his *Oedipus the King* and almost certainly from after the lifetime of Herodotus.²⁹ As in Herodotus, a child declines a life of luxury through refusal to come to any accommodation with a parent who had killed their other parent; as in Herodotus, the defiant behaviour of that child is contrasted with that of a more accommodating sibling of the same gender. In *Electra* there is no question of a proclamation banning anyone from associating with Electra, since she remains in front of her house to torture her father's killers with her cries; but

²⁹ For the association with Sophocles' *Electra* see Saïd (2002) 127, Griffin (2006) 49, and also Aly (1921) 94 = (1969) 94 who associates it with that related drama, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; for the date of Sophocles' play see Finglass (2007) 1-4, (2011) 1-6.

the possibility is raised that, if she does not desist, she will be buried alive underground, a fate that she purports to welcome (372-91).

In the case of *Electra* there is no question that Herodotus was influenced by Sophocles; but what about for *Oedipus the King*? The question was discussed nearly a century ago by Wolf Aly:

Für Hdt legt der Bann, den König Oidipus über den unbekannten Mörder ausspricht (V. 236ff.) die Vermutung nahe, daß der Sohn den Vater wie einen gebannten Mörder behandelt, sodaß der Bann des Vaters nur die Antwort auf dies Benehmen wäre. Das führt auf B [a stage defined on pp. 93-4 as 'Der Vater ächtet seinen Sohn ob seines Schweigens und wird, da er ihn voll Mitleid anspricht, von seinem eigenen Bann getroffen'], wo dieser in seinem eigenen Wort gefangen wird. So verflucht sich unwissend Oidipus selbst (V. 350). Das Motiv ist von Sophokles in die Oidipussage eingeführt, daß es Hdt von Sophokles habe, ist chronologisch sogar wie unmöglich. Eher ist das Umgekehrte der Fall, wie ja der König Oidipus auch sonst die Bekanntschaft mit Hdt's Werk zeigt. So wird auch verständlich, daß das Motiv bei Hdt viel nebensächlicher behandelt ist als in der Tragödie, wo es in den Mittelpunkt der Katastrophe gestellt ist.

For Herodotus the exclusion order that King Oedipus delivers in the case of the unknown murderer suggests that the son treats his father like an banished murderer, so that the father' ban would only be the answer to this behaviour. This leads to the stage whereby the father respects his son because of his silence and, because he addresses him full of pity, is penalised by his own exclusion order – a stage where this man is caught by his own words. In this way Oedipus himself unknowingly curses himself. The theme is introduced by Sophocles into the Oedipus saga; that Herodotus took it from Sophocles is chronologically as good as impossible. Rather

the reverse is the case, as indeed *Oedipus the King* shows familiarity with Herodotus' work in other ways too. So it is also understandable that the motif is handled in Herodotus in a very insignificant manner compared to what is in the tragedy, where it is placed in the central point of the catastrophe.

Aly (1921) 95 ≈ (1969) 95

In the light of the discussion in this chapter we may question whether the role of the proclamation in Herodotus is really 'very insignificant'; it is less of a set piece than in Sophocles, to be sure, but both texts use their proclamations to bring out key themes in their respective stories and to emphasise the essentially tragic nature of the tales. As for the chronology, the last dated events in Herodotus are from 431 and 430;³⁰ he cannot have died before the early 420s at the earliest. On the other hand, the most likely period of time for the first performance of Sophocles' play is between c. 440 and 420.³¹ It is not impossible that Sophocles' play came before Herodotus' casting of the Periander story. A connexion between Sophocles' *Antigone*, from perhaps c. 450,³² in which Antigone expresses the view that she would die for a brother, but not for a husband or for a son, and the passage of Herodotus, in which Intaphernes' wife pleads for the life of her brother rather than that of her husband or son, has long been accepted.³³ It is generally agreed that the direction of influence was from Herodotus to Sophocles, since the motif fits more organically in the former's story; indeed, several scholars have wanted to excise it from Sophocles altogether, in my view without justification. In her discussion of the passages Stephanie West concludes:

³⁰ Hdt. 6.91, 7.137, 7.233.2, 9.73; cf. Stadter (2012) 42 with n. 14.

³¹ See Finglass (forthcoming), introduction.

³² See Finglass (2011) 1-11.

³³ Soph. *Ant.* 904-20; Hdt. 3.119.

Herodotus' work has made a notably favourable impression at Athens in the 440s, and though, even if Herodotus repeated his lectures to many different groups, only a small proportion of Sophocles' audience can have heard him, the content of his lectures may well for a time have been the talk of the town. Though we should not look for subtle effects of intertextuality, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Sophocles expected some members of his audience to be reminded of Herodotus' account of Persian affairs under Cambyses and Darius.³⁴

At the end of his career Sophocles had Oedipus make a striking reference to how Greek customs regarding the behaviour of men and women were reversed by the Egyptians – a reversal which also happens to be central to Herodotus' account of that people.³⁵ In that last case, at least, there can be no question of Sophocles' coming first.

Such connexions suggest that it is far from impossible that one author could have been influenced by the other in their telling of the tales. But whether we need to draw that conclusion, whether the similarities are so great in this case that only direct influence could explain them, is open to question. In discussing Herodotus' account of Periander we might, as Moles does, refer to a 'specifically tragic intermyth with the story of Oedipus',³⁶ but not necessarily with the version of that myth as told by Sophocles. The ultimately self-destructive use of a proclamation of excommunication is the kind of literary device that could easily have occurred independently to different authors, allowing them as it does to highlight the ignorance of one character and the

³⁴ West (1999) 112; see further *ibid.* 110-12.

³⁵ *OC* 337-45, from a play first performed in 401 after Sophocles' death in 405; *Hdt.* 2.35.2-4.

³⁶ Moles (2007) 248.

irrational excess of the other. That in itself is justification enough for studying the two treatments in parallel. Nevertheless, we cannot quite rule out the possibility that Herodotus gave his friend Sophocles a tip, or even that Herodotus himself, in the audience at that first performance of *Oedipus the King*, received the inspiration there for his presentation of Periander.

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P. J. Finglass is Professor of Greek and Head of the Department of Classics at the University of Nottingham, and a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. He has published editions of Sophocles' *Electra* (2007) and *Ajax* (2011), of Pindar's *Pythian Eleven* (2007), and of Stesichorus (2014) with Cambridge University Press.